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Brief Report

Barriers to Practical Learning in the Field: A Qualitative Study of Iranian Nursing Students' Experiences

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Abstract

Background: Clinical training is an integral part of nursing education; however, some studies have shown that it is not always efficient.

Objectives: This study aimed to find out the factors that can impede nursing students' clinical learning.

Materials and Methods: In this qualitative study, data were collected via reflective journal writing. Purposeful sampling was used, and 12 senior nursing students were recruited to the study. The data were analyzed using a content analysis method.

Results: Three main categories were derived, including inappropriate communication, ineffective role models, and theory-practice gaps. Students perceived that inappropriate communication between instructors, staff members, and students had the greatest impact on student learning. The competence of clinical instructors and staff is an important factor affecting students' training. The clinical learning environment does not always integrate theory and practice together.

Conclusions: Nursing students did not experience effective clinical learning. Having expert instructors and supportive communication are important factors in creating a clinical learning environment.

Keywords: Nursing, Student, Communication, Learning, Practice, Qualitative Research

1. Background

Clinical training is an integral part of nursing education (1). Clinical practice gives students the opportunity to make decisions, apply theories, prioritize those decisions, learn time management, and provides them with a chance to practice their clinical skills (2, 3).

In a supportive learning environment, clinical teachers encourage students to be independent in their learning and they advise them to be self-reliant (4, 5). However, some earlier studies conducted in Iran have shown that clinical learning is usually ineffective for nursing students (6), students experience high levels of anxiety (6), nursing instructors are mostly inexperienced, and clinical learning fails to integrate theory and practice (7). However, few studies are available on the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of clinical learning in nursing education.

2. Objectives

This study aimed to find out the factors that can impede nursing students' clinical learning.

3. Materials and Methods

This qualitative research study used reflective journal writing as the main data collection method. Content analysis was used to identify categories in participants' descriptions.

3.1. Participants and Data Gathering

Participants were purposively selected among the nursing students who were studying in their seventh semester of the baccalaureate program in 2014 and who had clinical rotations in the hospitals affiliated to Bushehr University of Medical Sciences. After the researchers explained the objectives of the study to the participants, 12 students, out of 30, volunteered to participate and to keep reflective journals. In a briefing session, the first researcher gave them a notebook and presented them with a verbal description of how to complete the journaling task. The students were asked to write in their journals about their own experiences, important learning events, attitudes, feelings, and their own opinions on their clinical learning experiences in after passing a week of their practical course in each ward. They were asked to return these